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SUBJECT: BOSNIA CAMPAIGN 2006: NGOS CONTRIBUTE TO LIMITED
ISSUE-BASED DIALOGUE

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1. (U) This is the third in a planned series of elections
related telegrams.

2. (U) SUMMARY: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in
Bosnia and Herzegovina are generally active in the run-up to
the October national elections. In particular, a
USAID-funded coalition of NGOs called Civic Organizing for
Democracy (GROZD), has a twelve issue platform which has
received broad public support through a massive signature
campaign. Despite their organizational success, only the
Social Democratic Party has embraced the GROZD program with
any enthusiasm. Other parties have focused their campaign on
nationalist themes. Bosnians claim they are turned off by
nationalist campaigning, but they also are disengaged and
often do not understand Bosnia's political structure. GROZD,
a youth organization called Youth Information Agency (OIA),
and a few others are trying to mobilize voters through voter
education, get-out-the-vote campaigns and various initiatives
to hold political parties accountable for their promises.
Their efforts will most likely yield limited results on
October 1, but they are attempting to lay the groundwork for
a more politically engaged civil society in Bosnia. END
SUMMARY.

NGOs DEMAND ISSUE FOCUSED CAMPAIGN

3. (U) NGOs across Bosnia and Herzegovina have actively
campaigning on behalf of their respective issues in advance of
the October 1st national elections. GROZD, an umbrella
organization funded by USAID made up of several hundred NGOs,
has launched a campaign to focus attention on issues
important to voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina. GROZD
represents the first broad, citizen based attempt to change
the political dialogue in post-war Bosnia. Additionally, the
youth umbrella organization, OIA, has launched a catchy voter
information and get-out-the-vote campaign. Both
organizations, along with other NGOs are inserting a small
amount of civic activism into the pre-election atmosphere,
working to educate and mobilize voters in the short term, and
to change the relationship between civil society and the
government over the long term.

4. (U) GROZD, which was founded four years ago as an election
monitoring organization, canvassed Bosnia over recent months
to form a citizen-based political platform. GROZD visited
around 100 cities, interacting with local populations by

conducting surveys and holding open forums. With community input, the organization composed a 12 point platform that incorporates bread and butter issues such as unemployment, poverty, pensions, and health care, and national political issues such as EU membership, foreign investment and corruption. GROZD then took their platform on the road to build citizen support with the goal of securing 500,000 signatures by September 30, 2006 (NOTE: As of September 24, GROZD had 460,000. END NOTE). 500,000 is a significant number; it represents more votes than any single political party or coalition has received in the past.

15. (U) Simultaneously, GROZD marketed their platform to political parties. Four of the major parties, Party for Democratic Action (SDA), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH) and Party of Democratic Progress (PDP), have signed on to all or parts of the platform, as have many smaller parties. SDP, however, is the only party that GROZD says pays any substantive attention to their issues. Many political parties have been reluctant to endorse the GROZD platform because it identifies problems without recommending policy solutions. Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik claimed that the platform did not support the interests of Bosnian Serbs, suggesting that GROZD add an item on maintaining the existence of the RS. On September 30, GROZD will hold rallies in Bosnia's major cities -- Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla and Mostar -- hoping to use the pre-election embargo on campaigning by political parties to focus voters on their platform.

16. (U) The youth movement, OIA, is focused on voter education, get-out-the-vote events, and lobbying politicians on youth issues. Like GROZD, OIA began their election activism with a tour around Bosnia to discuss issues of importance to the 18-30 year old demographic group. OIA representatives told us they were shocked at how little the youth knew about the Bosnian political system. As a result, they produced a "shake the state" campaign that includes a

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mildly provocative pamphlet on the electoral system, and a voting game designed to quiz players on the Bosnian electoral system. Additionally, OIA has developed a youth-targeted platform to address perceptions that Bosnian politics is not youth friendly and motivate young voters to go to the polls. Like GROZD, OIA will hold public events, including "radio after parties" in discos, cafes and bars on the Saturday night before elections, as well as television advertisements about the passive registration voter system.

POLITICIANS AREN'T LISTENING

17. (U) While the GROZD and OIA movements are engaging some Bosnian citizens, they are having only a modest impact on the national political dialogue. Leading politicians have campaigned on the assumption that the majority of their support will come from Bosnians voting their fears. Representatives from Transparency International BiH (TI BiH) explained that people do not care about the economy when they are worried about returning to war. Over the last ten years, appealing to a nationalist agenda has worked for most political parties and they have little incentive to change their approach. The centralized nature of Bosnian political parties may also explain the lack of interest in issue-based campaigning. Party structures are tight and without the explicit support of individual party leaders, issues such as those on the GROZD platform will likely not enter into the political dialogue anytime soon. Local officials and political party candidates throughout Bosnia told us they support the GROZD platform, but doubt it will have much impact because their leadership does not actively support it. Politicians have also expressed skepticism of the NGO community in general asserting that NGOs are motivated by financial rewards.

APATHETIC BOSNIANS SEE LITTLE REASON TO VOTE

¶8. (U) According to the Bosnian Election Commission, 55 percent of eligible voters voted in the 2002 national elections. Experts predict that this year's turnout will be similar. According to many of our NGO interlocutors, the Bosnian electorate is generally apathetic and uninformed. In Zenica, a major city in central Bosnia, we were told that only about 20 percent of city residents would be able to name the Prime Minister. We hear repeatedly that voters have a broad distrust of politicians, seeing them as corrupt and unreliable. One NGO, the Center for Humane Politics (CHP), released a study in early September claiming that ruling parties have fulfilled only 7 percent of their election promises since 2002. While the accountability efforts of CHP received high profile media coverage, politicians have largely ignored the survey, and paradoxically some Bosnians cite it as an additional reason not to vote.

NGOs LOOK TO 2008, 2010

¶9. (U) GROZD, OIA and other NGOs remain focused on the future. Their goal, particularly in the case of GROZD, is to maintain their current momentum to affect change in the 2008 local elections and the next national elections in 2010. Specifically, GROZD hopes to demonstrate a high level of public support for their platform through turnout at their September 30 rallies. If they can mobilize a substantial amount of voters, GROZD hopes that national politicians will both take the organization more seriously, and appreciate that voters respond to issue-based dialogue. After the October elections, GROZD will focus on grassroots civic organization and building voter confidence.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) While much of the NGO story is a good one with active, engaged groups working to educate and motivate the Bosnian electorate, the near total lack of a meaningful response from the political establishment is unfortunate (though sadly typical). The Bosnian electorate's apathy contributes to a cycle of reinforcing behavior with voters staying away from the polls or voting along strictly ethnic lines. Political parties, who continue to win elections

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based on nationalist campaigning, have little incentive to change. It is interesting that all three major Bosniak parties -- SDA, SDP and SBiH -- signed onto GROZD's platform while neither of the two major Croat or two major Serb parties did. This suggests that at least Bosniak politicians may worry a little about whether substantive issues appeal to voters, enough that they want to be on the same page as their rival political parties. Encouraging as SDP's embrace of the GROZD platform is, SDP voters are mainly educated urbanites from Sarajevo and Tuzla who would have voted for SDP with or without its support of GROZD.

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